



Envision Arlington Diversity Task Group

Date: Monday, September 14, 2020

Time: 6:45 - 9:00 PM

Location: Online, via Zoom

Attendees: Michaiah Healy, Katell Guellec, Rajeev Soneja, Paula Jordan, Lynette Culverhouse, Robin Gottlieb, Kelly Lynema, Jennifer Kitowski, Alex Bagnail, Kellye Eversole, Catherine Nou, Brooks Harrelson, Louise Popkin, Adam MacNeill, Michael Brown

MINUTES

1. Zoom Protocols were read by Michaiah.
2. Introductions: Please state your name, something about yourself, what brings you here this evening, and what is giving you life during these times.
3. May minutes were summarized and approved. (Brooks moved to approve and Rajeev seconded that motion.)
4. Michaiah provided background for [the survey we sent out last month to the DTG member list](#). Co-chairs have been in discussions with other groups in Arlington who are committed to diversity and inclusion. It takes a broad and ongoing effort to reach community members. We are all speaking the language of outreach. How do we do this?
5. Katell summarized [the DTG survey](#). Discussion followed about the results and other ideas for how DTG can move forward with best impact.
 - Listening sessions/community get togethers: A chance for people to tell their stories. Several groups could co-sponsor an event. We also could bring speakers in.
 - Community conversations are definitely a good opportunity. This would include break-out groups so that everyone has a chance to speak, then come back at the end.
 - How do we include people who feel isolated for whatever reason? Either because they don't know where to plug in, or they fall in the moderate part of the conversation and are intimidated.
 - People need a way to make a practical impact. So much of social justice work is personal – where do you fit in the story? What part do you play? Until you can define this, you won't pull others into the work.

- An example is someone is involved in a monthly meeting to talk about white fragility, read, educate, etc. Could we start a monthly discussion after reading a book or listening to a podcast? Many people out there want to do something but are afraid to make a mistake.
- AFR has been talking about “in-reach” to keep ourselves educated and engaged.
- Michael said that people can contact him about efforts to make calls in swing states regarding the upcoming election.
- Place to discuss relevant warrant articles
- A specific, pointed topic and then space to talk about it.
- A monthly meeting is a lot these days when people are stressed. How do you engage with someone for 5 minutes? An elevator speech, or other ways to engage. For example, you can get many more responses from a survey than from a meeting.
- More exciting and engaging events rather than yet another meeting.
- Question: what were the most successful events? Brooks mentioned panel event in Town Hall on life-time parole, unequal justice in MA; partners with library/Arlington Reads on race, as well as Becoming Nicole author and her father. We reached people through all the faith groups, NAACP, neighboring town groups – they forwarded our events and vice versa.
- Could we be more of a clearinghouse for sharing events? Would high schoolers attend our meetings or how are they involved? Rajeev talked about efforts of the BSU, including subcommittees like hiring, Native American caricatures, etc. (DTG doesn't have an intern this year.)

6. Town Updates:

- Stakeholder roundtables leading up to 9/22 Pedrini meeting. Brooks represented DTG at one of those meetings. He made the following points at the meeting:
 - While the groups invited to participate in the RJ process do hold some institutional responsibility for equity and justice representation in town, none of the groups invited to the RJ process 'represent' the community, nor, in particular, the marginalized populations oppressed by his published writings.
 - No effort has been made that we're aware of to actually find out what those communities feel. There have been some individual efforts from within the communities to make their voices heard, but no sense that the town has undertaken that effort.
 - C4RJ have themselves agreed that the RJ process as currently practiced is inadequate when the victims are groups not individuals.
 - The RJ process that took place was subject to 'gaming' as evidenced by the resulting apology letter, which, a retired professor analyzed in detail, basically, as "not actually an apology, more a personal justification."

- DTG has received significant negative response from multiple historically oppressed categories of town members expressing that their faith in the police, their sense of safety in the community, and their hopes for equity have been severely damaged.
- There have been two years of frustration around this. Promises on the part of the town have not been kept (over a year ago Adam and Julie agreed to hold a larger community forum in the near future. This is a bit late.)
- There has been significant push-back on the reasoning for the process pursued, perhaps the town has comments on that push-back? It begins to look as though this was a financial consideration, rather than a community one. What is the price of the community feeling safe? What are they willing to do now?
- Paid position of community engagement person would be valuable.
- Will DTG have an opportunity to express disagreements with the process?

Brooks then reported that he had the following take-aways from the meeting itself:

- This is being positioned as the beginning of a new phase, not the end of the Pedrini case.
- According to the lawyers and his agreement, Pedrini doesn't have to do this. He says he wants to.
- There will be an active feedback/questioning period after prepared remarks, selected questions. The hope was to empanel representative of harmed groups to do the questioning, but I pointed out that some of those that had approached commissions had requested no police presence at the specific meeting and it will be difficult if not impossible to get them on the same call unless there was a way for them to be completely anonymous. This was acknowledged as a significant issue and they are going to be trying to work around it. I suggest some monitored out-of-band communication channel like Slack or Discord.
- The statement that Arlington has no infrastructure to really engage with the community and the suggestion of hiring a community engagement officer/director/coordinator was well received, and the consultant said, "I agree with that." I mentioned they should work with Jill, as Jill is already overloaded.
- The Pedrini issue is a done deal. He is not going to be fired. The RJ process is technically complete, it was requested that both the Town Manager and C4RJ publicly acknowledge the shortcomings of the process and the less-than-successful outcome.
- The issue going forward is the high likelihood that Pedrini is not the only member of the APD with those views. The Citizen's Review Board was mentioned, and the consultant emphasized multiple times that this was a major issue that needs to be addressed. I thought of,

but didn't get a chance to mention that police certification and liability insurance are interesting to consider as part of the solution.

There was then discussion to process feelings about this.

- What we need are: independent citizen review board (AFR is working on revising it after the warrant article was rejected); disciplinary process; community engagement officer.
 - How can DTG make statements? Are we allowed? We are a citizen group, so we do represent all. A motion was made and seconded for DTG co-chairs to draft a response. No vote was held; co-chairs will follow up.
 - Holding Adam responsible vs the Select Board
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7. APS is looking for members to join the search committee by 9/29 for new superintendent
 8. Jennifer talked about involvement in Arlington Democratic Party and activities: those interested can contact jennifer.litowski@gmail.com and adamjamesmacneill@gmail.com
 - need volunteers to work on campaigns at all levels
 - want to build better engagement with community and more diverse representation
 9. True Story Theater's next performances (<https://truestorytheater.com/events/>) and Arlington International Film Festival, November 5-15 (<https://aiffest.org/>)